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ABSTRACT

This guidebook focuses on the addition of environmental service learning in elementary, middle, or high school. Sections 1 and 2 describe an administrator's view of the success of service learning in her middle school and a student's opinion of her encounters with Mississippi's natural resources. Section 3 provides a rationale for environmental service learning as the best way to improve the environment, increase community responsibility, and develop leadership skills. Section 4 focuses on getting started and the four target groups--administrators, teachers, parents, and students--and their roles. Section 5 addresses integrating environmental service learning into the curriculum and provides examples of how to integrate all subject areas into a variety of units centered on different environmental projects: endangered species project, school landscaping project, weather information project, recycling project with a dramatic production, and outdoor classroom project. Section 6 suggests funding and resources for such projects as landscaping projects, recycling projects, and environmental protection. Use of instructional funds and partnership resources is addressed. Section 7 suggests ways in which students and community members can work together. Sections 8-10 address dissemination, reflection activities, and celebration activities. Section 11 suggests projects for replication. (YLB)

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LINKING LEARNING WITH LIFE

Take A Class Outdoors

A Guidebook for Environmental Service Learning

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Take A Class Outdoors

A Guidebook for Environmental Service Learning

by Linda Clifton
Tammy Mauney
and Rebekah Falkner

Linking Learning With Life

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College of Health, Education, and Human Development
Clemson University
209 Martin Street, Clemson, SC 29634-0726

864-656-2599
e-mail ndpc@clemson.edu
www.dropoutprevention.org

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A Letter From an Administrator

Environmental service learning started in our middle school four years ago when I became the principal. Several of my teachers and I moved to Booneville Middle School from a high school where we had already experienced the impact of an environmental service learning program.

Starting the program was easy—we just adapted programs to younger students and continued with our environmental focus. The wonderful part was that it worked even better with middle school students! Kids wanted to be involved and would stay after school and meet on Saturdays to participate. We even started a special summer program at the request of students.

The energy, excitement, and enthusiasm began to spread, and more teachers became involved. By the end of the first year, all of my faculty were actively participating.

Environmental service learning has now been integrated throughout the curriculum in grades five through eight at Booneville Middle School. All of our students participate in these projects which help protect our "home," the environment.

This program was also the driving force in securing an Environmental Education Center which will open in June on the Booneville Middle School Campus. The six million dollar project was funded by grants and partnerships and was the brainchild of middle school teachers. The Center is built of environmentally friendly materials and will in itself serve as a teaching tool. Students in grades five through eight will be served in the Center during the school year. During the summer, the Center will serve as a teacher training site for environmental education.

Service learning has helped to develop a bond between students, the school, and the community. Community partners have become more involved in the school, and community leaders have realized the importance of getting young people involved.

The benefits of environmental service learning are endless; uncover this secret to success in your school, and you too will reap unlimited rewards.

Linda Clifton
Booneville Middle School Principal

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Student Voice: Mississippi Mud and Other Natural Resources

I have had many close encounters with our state's natural resources. Let's see... I've eaten good old Mississippi Mud, I've gotten red clay all over good clothes, and I've swallowed way too much lake water. I have had plenty more good experiences with nature, ranging from feeding ducks to cleaning up a lake. Maybe you would like to read about them?

My closest experiences with Mississippi's natural resources have all come from various trips taken with my middle school, Booneville Middle School, in northeast Mississippi. I have also had direct contact with these resources at our city park and nature trails surrounding the school. One of my favorite learning trips was the TACO (Take a Class Outdoors) trip to J. L. Scott Marine Center on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. We teamed up with two instructors from the Center and several of our science teachers, and I learned how to identify a few trees from our hikes through the woods. As we lazed along a quiet bayou, I perfected my canoeing skills. At Ship Island, I got out in the ocean and hunted for numerous organisms with sieves, pumps, and a rather large net. I combed the beach for anything that did not move. I also learned a new painting technique which involved using watercolors, natural sponges, and ocean water. When we came back home, we were all pretty pickled from the salt water, but much more knowledgeable about the marine life on our coast.

On another TACO trip, we went to Tishomingo State Park, thirty miles away from our school. We chugged through the trails with a botanist from the University of Mississippi and learned about the flora in our area. We also caught a few birds, and after studying them carefully, we tagged them and set them free. A geologist from Mississippi State University taught us how to tell the age of rocks. Out in the woods, we learned how to work with maps and use a compass. This trip was just as much fun as our trip to the coast, and we got twice as dirty!

I have also helped with our school projects at Booneville's City Park. We helped restore and clean up an old pond on one of its walking trails. By cleaning out brush and lots of litter, we made the lake much prettier. We also planted shrubs around the park as a part of our community service project.

In addition, Booneville Middle School has several nature trails in a wooded area of the campus. Located where our two trails intersect, there is enough room in this outdoor classroom for about thirty students. When the weather is pleasant, English instructors take their students there for inspiration. Science teachers also use the area to inform students about the trees and other plants. Other teachers just use it for a change of scenery when students get restless.

These encounters with Mississippi's outdoors have taught me more than a thousand science classes could. I have learned to rough it and keep myself from getting totally lost out in the wilderness of our state's parks. I found out how to keep my community beautiful. And I have learned about the animals and plants of our state. You know, I found these experiences to be so much more enjoyable than eating Mississippi Mud!

Rebekah Falkner

Why Environmental Service Learning

As the natural resource crisis reaches global proportions—air, water, and land pollution; limited supplies of fossil fuel; threatened endangered habitats; species facing extinction—students **must** be given the information and skills they need in order to take action to protect the earth. Teachers **must** help students look at environmental issues and make a commitment to find solutions.

What better way is there to improve the environment, increase community responsibility, and develop leadership skills than environmental service learning?

Utilizing environmental service learning activities to teach core objectives can:

- enhance the framework objectives in the curriculum while addressing needs in the community
- make science education more relevant to students, thus meeting the need to increase student interest in science
- let interdisciplinary activities provide connection and strength to the academic program
- give students opportunities to research information, analyze environmental issues within the context of the information gathered, determine positive alternatives, and practice implementing solutions within the classroom setting
- improve grades and achievement test scores as students become involved
- draw the community into the school, providing intergenerational learning opportunities
- utilize the school as an ideal laboratory for hands-on experiments as it provides a real world model
- motivate students to come to school, increasing attendance rates

- give students a sense of pride in the school and community
- develop a feeling of belonging to school and community
- help at-risk students become leaders, while lowering dropout rates
- enable students to recognize qualities in other students that have never surfaced in the academic environment

The success of the schoolwide environmental service learning program at our school can be measured in several ways. The impact that service learning has played in our school and its effect on academics is evidenced by the rise in achievement test scores, the drop in dropout rates, and an increase in attendance rates. For us, however, its success is best measured by observing students working together on hands-on projects. The excitement in the students' eyes and the pride they take in their work help educators understand the value of this program in our school.

Getting Started

Environmental service learning is contagious; it can quickly spread across the curriculum and throughout the school.

There are four target groups that must be taken into consideration when starting an environmental service learning program:

- Administrators. Administrators must see that there are benefits for students and that instructional time is spent wisely. Talk with an administrator who has the program in place and visit the school.
- Teachers. Teachers have so many core objectives to teach; they don't need an add-on. Train teachers to teach core objectives **with** environmental service learning activities.
- Parents. Parents will need an orientation of how the program works, what their role will be, and how the program benefits the students and community. Newspaper articles and PTO presentations are an excellent way to reach parents.
- Students. Students will become more excited as they get involved in environmental service activities. Start with a small program like composting to introduce them to service learning. Now get the students actively involved in accessing the needs of the community and identifying ways they can address those needs. Take the projects they want to pursue and integrate them into the curriculum.

If students decide the school needs to start a recycling program:

Administrators must know what is involved in the project and what the cost will be. Students and teachers should have a well-developed plan in place to present to the administrator for approval. Supervision is also a key issue and should be addressed at the onset with the administrator. For the project to be successful and grow, administrative support is essential.

Teachers can use projects like recycling to teach many core objectives. In lower grades where classification skills are taught,

students can sort glass, plastic, and aluminum while singing "Here we go to the recycling bin." Students in middle school study waste management and can learn how to convert waste materials into usable projects by making terrariums from discarded plastic soft drink bottles or making pins for Mother's Day from discarded jigsaw puzzle pieces. High school students can use math skills to chart food waste in the cafeteria as they place waste into student-built composting bins.

Parents can help by supervising students on a field trip to a recycling center or landfill and starting recycling programs in their homes. They can also assist with cutting materials for the composting bins and directing students with the assembly of the bins.

Students are the key players in these projects; they must be involved in all phases.

With the guidance of teachers, students must decide on a project their community needs and develop a plan of action. Conducting a needs assessment in the school and community will provide direction for the students and insure priority is given to the most imperative needs of the community. Writing letters in English class to Congressmen about environmental concerns and developing a pamphlet to distribute within the community would be a wonderful way to get students interested and involved in recycling issues. When they have decided on an issue they want to address, set up a time they can meet with city government officials to discuss concerns and possible solutions. Art classes can utilize their talents by painting recycling bins for the school and city park. Writing and performing a pep rally on recycling will help to promote the recycling issue while teaching waste management skills. Students can also utilize the Internet to research recycling issues and develop a web page to share recycling ideas.

Students are very creative; give them the opportunity to plan, create, develop, and solve, and you will be surprised at the results.

Integrating Environmental Service Learning Into Your Curriculum

Environmental service learning can become a bridge across the curriculum. It allows teachers to create unique and student-appealing ways to cover traditional classroom objectives. Complete integration of subjects centered on an environmental theme allows students to see the whole picture. Just as the earth is a large system made up of more complex smaller systems, your service learning project can become the same.

Below are examples of how to integrate all subject areas into a variety of units centered on different environmental projects.

Endangered Species Project

Students will combine pictures drawn in Art and paragraphs typed in Computer Discovery to print a coloring book for lower elementary students. They will deliver these books to the children and perform their endangered species skits in an effort to teach a younger generation how to protect our future.

- Science. Establish a knowledge base of the effects related to endangered species.
- Library Skills. Research endangered species using computers and text.
- Geography. Locate a particular species range on a world map.
- Math. Research the rate at which a species population has declined over the past fifty years and report this data graphically.
- Language Arts. Write a descriptive paragraph to include the name of the species, a physical description of the species, a description of its habitat, and recommendations for its survival.
- Computer Discovery. Type and edit paragraphs written in Language Arts.

- Art. Draw a picture of a species in its natural habitat on a fabric square and quilt into a beautiful wall hanging.
- Performing Arts. Write and perform skits based on how a child can help save an endangered species.
- Music. Start a school chorus that performs only environmental songs.

School Landscaping Project

Students will learn life skills centered on botany, measurement, design, and communication while providing landscaping for the school campus.

- Science. Establish a knowledge base of the different types of plant species the students will be working with. This might include soil chemistry, necessary moisture level, or the amount of light needed for each of the plants.
- Art/Design. Blueprints are drawn to scale of the planned project.
- Math. Measure the distance between each plant, the depth of each hole, and the amount of water used on each plant. This can be done metrically to encourage the use of the international system of measurement.
- Language Arts. Journal entries are made emphasizing personal feelings of how the students felt as they performed each portion of the activity.

Weather Information Project

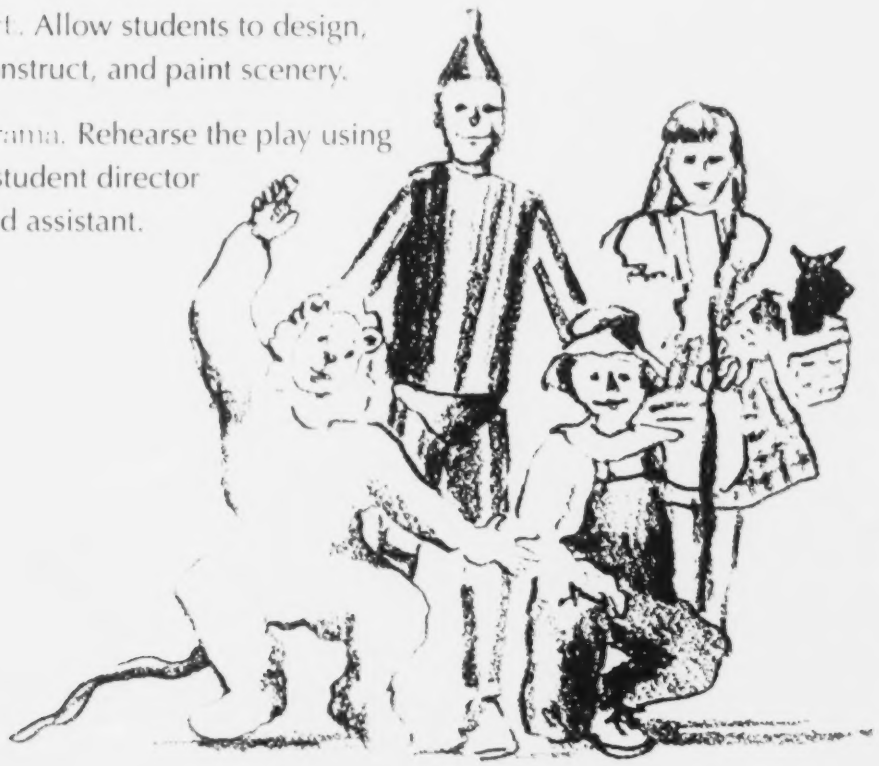
Focusing on collecting GLOBE weather data, students will learn about natural cycles and patterns of the earth and earth forces as they serve their community, nation, and world by providing climate and weather information to leading scientists around the world.

- Science. Teach weather facts and establish a knowledge base. Allow students to master terminology and show a proficiency in measurement techniques before teams of three are allowed to proceed to the outdoor GLOBE weather station unsupervised.
- Building Trades. Provide blueprints from the GLOBE program and allow students to interpret and utilize them to construct the outdoor weather station.
- Math. Take and record measurements of tree height using a clinometer constructed in class. This incorporates geometry by determining the tangent of a specific angle.
- Computer Discovery. Send daily GLOBE weather measurements via the Internet to a central data processing site where they are combined with other worldwide reports.
- Communications. Send GLOBE mail, a form of electronic mail specifically for GLOBE schools, to students all around the world. Throughout the year, allow students to exchange global weather data as well as school and personal information with these international pen pals.

Recycling Project With a Dramatic Production

Students learn about the need for recycling and serve the community by sharing this knowledge with PTO/PTA groups, students in different grades or classes, and at any community-wide celebration or convention.

- Science. Establish a knowledge base specific to their production, in this case recycling.
- Language Arts. Plan the story using group suggestions and ideas with the scripts written to include as many recycling facts as possible.
- Home Economics. Allow students to design and construct costumes using a sewing machine or simply a glue gun, brads, tape, and staples.
- Art. Allow students to design, construct, and paint scenery.
- Drama. Rehearse the play using a student director and assistant.



Outdoor Classroom Project

Building an outdoor classroom on your school campus is an exciting way to introduce students to service learning. Students will share this classroom with the entire school as well as such youth organizations as Boy and Girl Scout troops.

- Science. Establish a knowledge base of facts about the natural resources already existing on the school grounds that will be utilized in this classroom.
- Computer Discovery. Design the classroom using a computer-aided drafting and design program.
- Math. Take measurements of lumber to be used for seats and determine the slope of the land using surveying equipment.
- Building Trades. Saw the premeasured lumber, nail the benches into place, and mix and pour the concrete used to stabilize the seats.
- Language Arts. Reflect on the building experience through journal entries.

Funding and Resources

Budgets for environmental service learning activities vary depending on the scope of the projects. Some projects, such as picking up litter and charting the amount collected, have no cost while providing a great service for the school and teaching core objectives in math and science. Others do require some support, and there are a variety of resources in your community or state which support environmental projects.

Landscaping Projects. Planting shrubs and flowers on school campuses or in city parks will require a larger budget if the work is extensive. Funding for this kind of project can be obtained as follows:

- Schools can form partnerships with the city, local nurseries, or community garden clubs.
- Chevron's Community Pride Grants can also be used for projects of this nature.
- Your students can team with a local 4-H Club and work together.
- Civic clubs and local businesses are always an excellent source of funding and assistance for community improvement.
- The Department of Natural Resources can provide help with projects such as building birdhouses for nature areas, stenciling storm drains, and providing assistance in designing a landscaping plan.

Recycling Projects. Funding for recycling projects can be obtained through various sources:

- Grants from the Department of Environmental Quality.
- Corporations, like Weyerhaeuser in Mississippi, provide incentive funds to start or expand recycling programs.
- City and county governments can provide support.

Environmental Preservation. Special programs in some states, like Mississippi's Keep Mississippi Beautiful and the Mississippi Alliance for Environmental Education, will provide training, materials, and some small grants to teachers for environmental projects.

Instructional Funds. Since environmental service learning can be an exciting way to teach core objectives, instructional funds can often be used for special projects.

- Students studying plant growth would only need seeds and a small plot of soil to plant a garden for senior citizens. Students can experience the entire process of soil testing, soil preparation, planting, nurturing, picking the vegetables, and distributing them to senior citizens.

- Developing teaching materials for younger students such as a coloring book about the state's wildflowers is an interdisciplinary project which benefits two sets of learners. The project will teach the students the parts of a flower in science class. Descriptive poems can be written about the flowers in English class. Art students will draw the flowers and get the book ready for printing. The cost of the book will be small (approximately $2.00 per book) and would probably be a project the PTO would consider funding.

Parents, students, and teachers are also an excellent resource for environmental service learning. They can provide the most valuable resource of all—their time. Working together to improve the environment brings the community together while providing everyone a better place to live.

Partnerships. Partnerships are invaluable as your program develops.

- Local industries may provide funds for lumber for a composting bin or outdoor classroom.
- The Eisenhower Math and Science Consortium at SERVE will help to identify exemplary programs that can be replicated.
- City government may provide matching funds for projects that improve the community.
- NASA provides pilot programs, like tracking endangered species, and materials for teachers.
- The GLOBE program is a low-cost program that utilizes the Internet. The program teaches students to monitor the weather and compare data with students from all over the world.
- The Forestry Commission provides training programs for teachers like Project Learning Tree.
- Museums of Natural Science provide environmental programs for students and training for teachers.
- Marine Education Centers provide programs that teach students about water quality, the effects of pollution, and marine life through hands-on activities.
- State parks are another rich resource for studies in botany, geology, entomology, and ornithology. There is no cost for this valuable resource.
- Natural resources in your own community provide an exciting free laboratory for students of all ages. The clearing of a roadway may uncover fossils and other artifacts that teach about the environmental history of the area. A low area on the school campus may serve the school as a teaching tool when it is developed as a wetland.

Community Involvement

Throughout the project, get your community involved. All members of a community should be involved in preserving the environment, and your students could provide the leadership and direction needed. Students and community members can work together in the following ways:

- They can give speeches about environmental concerns and share ideas on community improvement.
- Adults in the community can assist by teaching students how to build such things as birdhouses or feeders.
- Nurseries can provide plants left over after planting season and also help in designing landscaped areas.
- Business partners may provide birdseed or landscaping timers.
- Associations can help students write grants for necessary purchases like lumber, plants, tools, and water testing kits.
- Parents can assist by supervising after-school and Saturday projects or setting up model programs in their homes.
- The Cooperative Extension Service can provide training materials like the *Away With Waste* curriculum.

Share your ideas with these people and you will be amazed at how quickly your community will become involved in everything you do.

Spreading The Word

Dissemination is a very important aspect of any environmental service learning activity. It not only alerts a larger audience to pertinent environmental issues, but it also gives students a chance to showcase their work and be rewarded with recognition. There are many ways to disseminate information about your projects.

- Allow students to make presentations at both adult and youth conferences.
- Display products made by students at school-sponsored events such as PTO/PTA meetings, open houses, and family science nights.
- Schedule an environmental fair during Earth Week at the school and invite other schools as well as the public to attend.
- Record public service announcements with environmental tips for local radio and television stations.
- Print student written books and exchange with other schools to encourage environmental awareness.
- Present student written environmental skits and sing student composed songs at local nursing homes.
- Develop and build an environmental theme float to be entered in local parades.
- Feature students' work in local newspaper and educational journals.
- Develop and maintain a web site filled with information about current and future environmental service learning projects.

Reflection

Reflection activities allow students to assess their own thinking strategies and improve their performances. This is especially helpful in environmental service learning projects, for it allows students to not only judge their own successes and failures but also those of the entire project. This student input is extremely useful in planning future projects. Listed below are some ideas for reflection activities.

- Conducting group discussions about the project. This type of reflection allows all students to participate verbally and helps to enhance communication skills. One way this type of reflection was used occurred after completing a comprehensive unit on landscaping. The students informed the teacher, in a group discussion, that they did not receive enough information about each plant species prior to the landscaping activity. They suggested that next time the teacher bring in one live example of each plant species in addition to the photocopied pictures and textual information that was provided for them. This suggestion proved to be very useful for the teacher in future landscaping projects.

- Critiquing videotaped student presentations and performances. The video camera is a necessary tool in conducting reflection activities. This particular example of reflection can be conducted at any point throughout the project. One example where the students critiqued their own performance occurred during an environmental drama production. After viewing a videotaped dress rehearsal of their recycling play, the students felt a need to make several costume changes. They decided the costumes needed to be more appropriate to the recycling theme and more eye-catching. They decided to use actual garbage cans with leg and arm openings instead of the original cloth and paper garbage can costumes. This made a big difference to the audience and emphasized the recycling theme even more.

- Reexamining journal entries made throughout the project. Many students do not feel comfortable expressing personal feelings in a large group setting. This is why journal writing can become necessary in service learning projects. An example of this occurred while writing an environmental children's book. Several students expressed in their journal entries that they did not get to share their opinions while in cooperative learning groups. This told the teacher that he or she should be monitoring the groups more closely and devising new methods of idea sharing.

Celebration

Celebration is often ignored, but it is a key component in establishing a successful service learning program. Any activity in which students are praised for their contributions makes a lasting impact on their self-esteem. With service learning, all students can be successful. Nontraditional leaders emerge, some achieving success for the first time in their school careers. These are some examples of celebration activities related to environmental service learning:

- Have a service learning awards banquet for all participants and award plaques of accomplishment after students complete the building of an outdoor classroom. This type of celebration is one of the best. A good community partner to involve is a local caterer who might provide the meal or discount the price. Ask a local business partner to sponsor the award plaques or certificates for a group of rarely recognized students who will eventually make up a large percentage of their work force.
- Host a swimming party/pizza party for all students who volunteered to collect weather data throughout the year. Local pizza restaurants will often donate pizza, and soft drink companies will provide drinks and cups. The city park is a good partner to have as they will usually donate the use of a swimming pool and lifeguards for this private celebration. Students can play games such as Earth Volleyball or Slam-Dunk the Earth using a beach ball painted like the earth.
- Invite local city officials, such as the mayor, to present special citations of achievement to each participant as they complete a landscaping project at a local city park. The local park director is usually very cooperative and needs only to be asked to participate in or organize such an event. The press should be contacted, and pictures printed in the newspaper.

- Take a field trip together to a local amusement park after students have read and distributed endangered species coloring books to students in neighboring schools. Parents are usually glad to help with the chaperoning and can also be asked to provide sandwiches and drinks for lunch. Another partner to call upon is your local school board. They may provide moneys for admission to the park or provide bus transportation.

Projects for Replication

By incorporating environmental service learning projects into your classroom, learning takes on a new face. Students begin to see classroom lessons relating to real-life situations. Instruction finally has meaning and purpose for your students. After having mastered classroom objectives, students could perform the following environmental service learning projects:

- Landscape your school campus, local city park, or downtown area.
- Start a schoolwide recycling campaign.
- Build an outdoor classroom on your school campus.
- Write and perform environmental skits at a school assembly.
- Paint existing garbage cans with recycling slogans.
- Design environmentally based coloring books, storybooks, or poetry books for younger students.
- Design, build, and enter an environmental theme float in a local parade.
- Purchase a replantable Christmas tree, make recyclable ornaments, such as peanut butter bird feeder cones, and replant the tree on your campus.
- Make sheets of recycled paper, write a Valentine message on them, and deliver them to local nursing homes.
- Paint pictures of endangered species on cloth squares and have them quilted into a beautiful wall hanging.
- Build birdhouses, feeders, and bat boxes and place them throughout the school campus.
- Research and construct tree identification plaques for every species of tree on your campus.

- Arrange a tour for younger students through your student designed school nature trail.
- Conduct a schoolwide environmental fair, complete with trivia contests, project displays and student-made posters during Earth Week.
- Adopt an endangered species and raise money for its preservation.
- Place public service announcements about environmental issues on local radio and television stations.

Conclusion

Environmental service learning is an excellent addition to any elementary, middle, or high school. It encourages interdisciplinary teaching by allowing the teacher to use many new and unique methods in covering the same curricular objectives.

Environmental service learning is a wonderful community builder. When the community takes an active part in an environmental service learning program, the program can only be enhanced and grow. Community partners often open many doors that educators do not find readily available.

Environmental service learning also helps meet the growing need of increasing students' interest in science. It attracts their interest with hands-on learning and keeps it with science activities that stimulate their curiosity.

Lastly, environmental service learning is especially effective with at-risk youth. Many an at-risk student has found his or her niche while actively participating in these service-oriented projects.

In conclusion, environmental service learning has made a lasting impact on the students at Booneville Middle School. We hope you see similar results.

Resources

◆ Eisenhower Math and Science Consortium at SERVE
1203 Governor's Square, Suite 400
Tallahassee, FL 32301
1-800-854-0476

◆ National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)
Education and Community Affairs
John C. Stennis Space Center
Stennis Space Center, MS 39529-6000
228-688-2425

◆ The GLOBE Program
744 Jackson Place
Washington, DC 20503
202-395-7600

◆ Learn and Serve National Service-Learning Clearinghouse
University of Minnesota
Vocational and Technical Education Building
1954 Buford Avenue, R-290
St. Paul, MN 55108
800-808-SERVe
http://www.nicsl.coled.umn.edu

About the Authors

Linda Clifton is the principal of Booneville Middle School in Booneville, Mississippi. She has been the coordinator for the environmental service learning program in the Booneville School District for the past six years.

Tammy Mauney is a seventh and eighth grade teacher at Booneville Middle School. She has been involved in environmental service learning for the past six years.

Rebekah Falkner is a student at Booneville High School in Booneville, Mississippi. She is an honor student and a member of the Booneville High School Band.

Booneville Middle School is located in the northeastern corner of Mississippi. The small, rural school serves 369 students in grades five through eight. The school has received the Outstanding Middle School Award for Service Learning twice, Colgate's Award for Youth Services, Weyerhaeuser's Award for Recycling three times, Keep Mississippi Moving Award from the Mississippi Municipal Association, Keep Mississippi Beautiful Award, and SERVE's Exemplary Program Award in Science. Booneville Middle School has also received support from the Learn and Serve America Program.

National Dropout Prevention Center

College of Health, Education, and Human Development
Clemson University, 209 Martin Street, Clemson, SC 29634-0726
Telephone: 864-656-2599 e-mail: ndpc@clemson.edu